



EPIDEMIC INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (EIS) CDC's "DISEASE DETECTIVES"

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- The Nation has a growing need for specially trained epidemiologists to address current public health problems as well as problems of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.
- As events in the Fall 2001 have demonstrated, the Nation needs a "rapid response" capability to meet the real and ongoing threats of terrorism and bioterrorism.
- CDC needs an available cadre of trained epidemiologists to provide technical assistance requested by local, state, and national governments.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

The Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) is a unique 2-year, post-graduate program that consists of service and on-the-job training for health professionals interested in epidemiology. Since 1951, approximately 2,500 EIS Officers (CDC's "Disease Detectives") have graduated from this program. In addition to the on-the-job training gained by investigation of disease outbreaks, natural and man-made disasters, and other public health emergencies, the EIS Program provides formal instruction to EIS Officers through courses in epidemiology, biostatistics, public health ethics and law, evaluation of surveillance systems, scientific writing, and prevention effectiveness.

- In the fall of 2001, over 125 officers were deployed – often more than once – to assist state and local health departments to respond to the September 11th terrorist and anthrax attacks.
- In FY 2002, 72 officers graduated from the EIS Program and 89 officers were hired, oriented, and placed in the program.
- The 2002 EIS conference brought together over 1,500 current EIS officers and alumni, other public health officials or researchers, and the media. Papers presented at the EIS conference address the vast range of public health problems tackled by EIS officers. This past year many of the presentations focused on the EIS response to the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center and the response to the intentional release of anthrax through the postal system.
- In FY 2002, EIS officers responded to 81 formal requests for epidemiological assistance (EPI-AIDS) in a variety of locations (71 in the United States, and 10 in other countries). Requests for assistance were primarily for infectious disease problems (79%), but other investigations addressed emergency surveillance (5%), response to environmental problems (4%), injuries (4%), maternal and child health (2%) issues, and other problems (6%).

Example of program in action: In the summer on 2002 there was a dramatic increase in the number of West Nile Virus (WNV) infections across the southern and Midwestern United States. State health authorities in Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, and Mississippi requested assistance from CDC to assist with this emergency public health problem. CDC teams were sent to the affected areas to help with containment and control of the epidemic. The teams also conducted studies to learn more about the risk factors for disease, modes of transmission, diagnosis, clinical presentation, and prevention. EIS officers formed the backbones of the teams sent to these states, with 39 officers being deployed on 45 different occasions. EIS officers also took lead roles in the investigation of WNV transmission by blood or tissue products.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

The CDC is currently implementing a plan to place an EIS Officer or EIS-trained epidemiologist in every state to help improve the public health infrastructure; training for these officers will be expanded to include terrorism preparedness and emergency response. In addition, CDC's EIS Program will continue to address the continuing education needs of state and local epidemiologists.

For additional information on this and other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/programs.

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